

of this if we are going to get a conclusion.

I see that the gentlewoman from Washington wanted to make a comment.

Mrs. SMITH of Washington. I wanted to ask you a question, how I got the number, but you happened to say how I got the number. If they want to call our offices, though, and find out or if I want to tell someone, is it better to use that number or our own office number?

Mr. HOKE. If they have the office number, it is better to use the office number.

Mrs. SMITH of Washington. If not, what number?

Mr. HOKE. It's 202-224-3121.

Mrs. SMITH of Washington. Thank you. Listening to you, what really excites me about this is that we are not to the end; in fact, we are just at the beginning. I look at all that has been coming up, and the proposals are clearly that there are ways to fix this system and there are ways to make it better.

Mr. HOKE. I see that my time has expired. Maybe we could talk about that in the next special order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON, is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON from Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.]

TRIBUTE TO EAGLE SCOUT FROM MAINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maine [Mr. LONGLEY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LONGLEY. Mr. Speaker, one of the great privileges of being a Member of this body is the opportunity to address this Chamber and to address remarks to the Speaker. I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to call attention to an outstanding young man from my district who last Saturday was awarded the rank of Eagle Scout.

What is significant about this award is out of the thousands of scouts who do achieve the rank of Eagle Scout, this is the fourth son of Charles Gaspar of North Berwick who has achieved that rank; his son John, again, the fourth of four brothers.

He has many accomplishments. Most recently he ranked first in his high school class. He is an accomplished chess player and he aspires to be a physician. Mr. Speaker, I certainly would want to state for the RECORD my pride in having this young man as a resident of my district.

NATIONAL LOBSTER MONTH

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to address to the Chair, and knowing the Chair's great interest in fine cuisine, that my district is the home of the

Maine lobster. The month of August is going to be Maine Lobster Month and I know that many Members who potentially may be taking vacations may have an interest in traveling to the rockbound coast of Maine to partake of this culinary delight.

We have over 6,500 licensed lobstermen in the State, over 400 dealers, and last year we produced nearly 40 million pounds of lobsters; almost 100 million dollars' worth of production that was distributed around the world.

Again, it is a great source of pride to me, Mr. Speaker, to represent the First District of the State of Maine and particularly the fishermen and the lobstermen in the State. Again, I compliment them on the great accomplishment of Maine Lobster Month in the month of August.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. OBERSTAR] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. OBERSTAR addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.]

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WE NEED TO LOOK AT MEDICARE MORE CLOSELY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HAYWORTH). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Washington [Mrs. SMITH] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to talk more about Medicare, because I am finally beginning to have hope. I took the report, the task force report home, that yellow book that scared me so much, and I flew 7 hours with it and I read through it and I read each section. Surely enough, the President's trustees were right. Financially, it is trouble.

I think what has been exciting to me as a newcomer here, a freshman in this particular year, is that solutions are coming quickly. What really is clear is that the people suggest and the ones coming up here say that we should be clearly looking at fraud and abuse, we should be looking at paperwork and how much there is, and that if we would do those two things, it would be a good beginning to fixing the system. We are going to protect the system.

I have not heard one person on either side of the aisle say we are not going to have Medicare. It confirmed what I have been saying, which is I am not willing to have any person that is on Medicare now, any person relying on this vital program for their life, to wake up one day and have it gone by default, because we do nothing to preserve the system, or by taking it away from people we have made a commitment to.

So what we are seeing now is people getting out the rhetoric. There are a few people that stand up here each day and harp that it is going to be gone, but they are the minority in both par-

ties now. Most are saying, let's fix it, let's preserve it, let's make sure it is stronger and it is simpler.

The system is too tough for me, and my background is paperwork. So if my background is paperwork and I cannot figure out the paper, then how can someone else that is trying to manage after an illness? So that is just an exciting thing that I am seeing happening and a great hope for the system.

Mr. HOKE. Would the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. SMITH of Washington. I would be glad to yield.

Mr. HOKE. Mr. Speaker, I think that it is very important that we remind ourselves and each other and the Speaker that one of the criteria that we will follow in this is that every single person who is currently on Medicare has an absolute guarantee from the Republican Conference in this House, the majority of this House, that those people, if they choose to stay on the Medicare Program the way that it is designed today, that is a choice that they will be absolutely guaranteed to have, and that nobody, at least on this side of the aisle, nobody is suggesting anything other than that.

Mrs. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I think the exciting thing about that is that it is like a rainbow. We have had this system that everyone has known for nearly 10 years was going to be in financial trouble, and they kind of just shoved it to the side. The system just sat there and got internally financially worse.

Now what we are hearing about is something nobody talked about because they knew there were problems in the system, and that is choice for senior citizens.

Mr. HOKE. I think you are right and I think that is what is exciting. The place that we can look first in terms of having hope for being able to solve this problem, other than the fact that I hope that as Americans, we all just have a general positive sense of our ability to meet any challenge, under any circumstance, and meet it positively and with vigor and with dignity and know that we are going to succeed.

One of the places that we can look, and probably the place we ought to look first generally, is in the private sector. I know, as you know, what has happened in the private sector. We have gone from over double digit inflationary rates in health care down to about 4 percent in the past couple of years. We are running at 10.5 percent in the public sector inflation per year, at 4 percent in the private sector. Clearly, if we simply use that as our model, right there, that is actually less than the increase that we have budgeted in Medicare over the next 7 years.

Mrs. SMITH of Washington. What the gentleman from Ohio is saying, is let's look at what worked in the general medical to bring down the inflation rate for Medicare. You know what they did? They streamlined paperwork, they got rid of fraud, they dealt with giving individuals choice.